

Biography of Lawrence Douglas Wilder

L. Douglas Wilder's career in public service spans 40 years and is noted for several historic milestones.

Mr. Wilder became the first African-American to be elected governor in the U.S., leading the Commonwealth of Virginia from 1990 to 1994. As the Commonwealth's 66th governor, he was commended for his sound fiscal management and balancing the state budget during difficult economic times. *Financial World* magazine ranked Virginia as the best-managed state in the U.S. for two consecutive years under his administration.

Prior to his time as governor, he served as lieutenant governor from 1986 to 1990 and as a state senator from 1969-1985, chairing committees on Transportation; Rehabilitation and Social Services; Privileges and Elections; the Virginia Advisory Legislative Council; and the Senate Steering Committee, which appoints committee members.

Other legislative achievements include providing state health care coverage for sickle-cell anemia patients, toughening penalties for capital murderers and prison escapees, and expanding low and moderate-income housing. For eight years, he persisted in sponsoring legislation that eventually led to establishing a state holiday honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. making Virginia the first state in the nation to have a legislative holiday for Dr. King.

Persuaded to run for mayor in 2004, Mr. Wilder received eighty percent of the vote and carried each of the City's nine council districts and every precinct in the City. He was sworn in as Richmond's first elected mayor in 2005 and served until 2009, making him the first African-American mayor elected by popular vote from all of the citizens of Richmond. During his term, Richmond made remarkable progress in its fight against crime, having its lowest rate in 27 years. Downtown economic development and neighborhood improvements were widespread, and financial management reached a new level of scrutiny that served taxpayers well.

An attorney by profession, Mr. Wilder gained recognition as a leading criminal trial lawyer. He graduated from Howard University Law School in 1959 and later established the legal firm that became known as Wilder, Gregory & Associates, one of the few minority-owned businesses in Virginia at the time. Prior to earning his J.D., he graduated from Virginia Union University with a B.S. degree in Chemistry and worked in the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner as a toxicology technician.

At present, Mr. Wilder is a Distinguished Professor at Virginia Commonwealth University's L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs where he lectures and hosts symposia, including the most recent, "By the People: The Role of Urban Communities in Improving Housing, Education, and Public Policy". He is also the author of *Son of Virginia: A Life in America's Political Arena*, published by Lyons Press, which was recently released in paperback. In the past year, he has served as the keynote speaker for *The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Kerner Commission Report National Conference* held at the University of Minnesota and the University of Richmond's Law Symposium, *The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Fair Housing Act: Past, Present, and Future*.

Wilder continues to be a champion of people and causes. He's still a highly-involved and highly-dedicated citizen of the city that he has called home for most of his life, and one of its best and most outspoken ambassadors. A previous recipient of the NAACP's prestigious Spingarn Medal, Wilder will also serve as the Honorary Chair of the First Africans to English North America Committee for the 2019 Commemoration and is also the driving force for establishing a National Slavery Museum in Virginia.

